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UPDATED TRENDS IN CHILD MALTREATMENT, 2011

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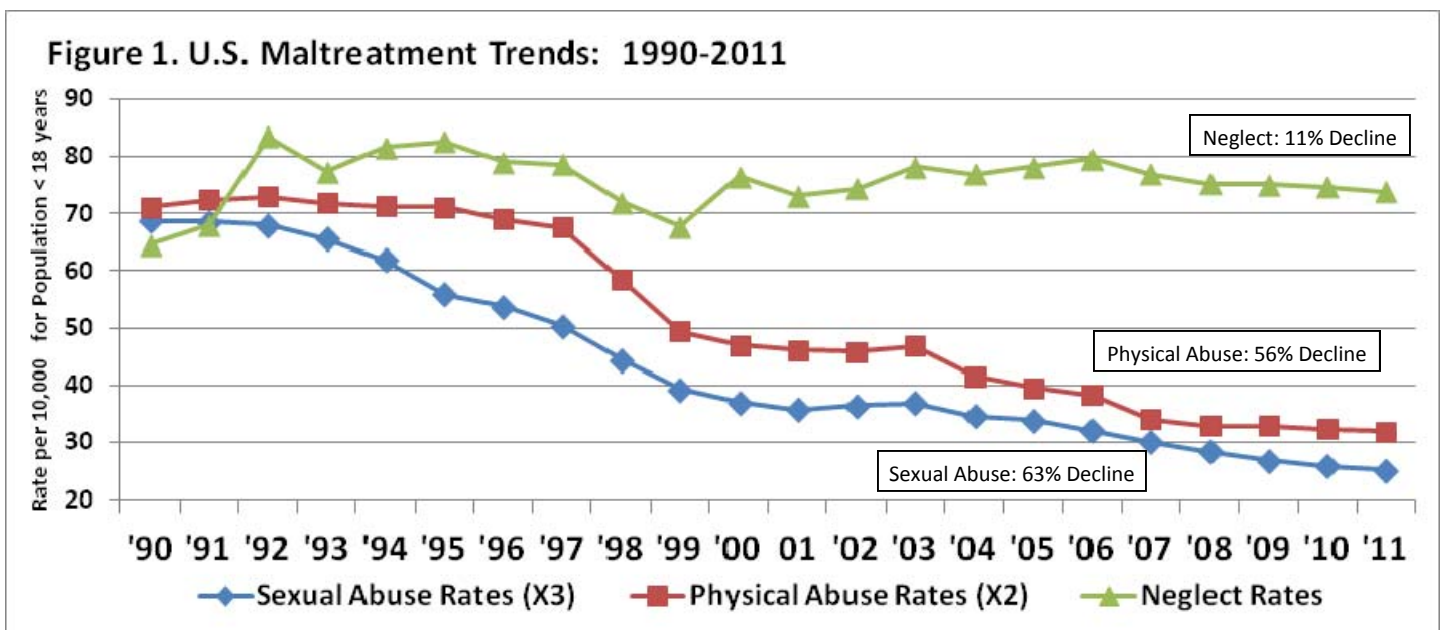
National statistics from 2011 showed continuing small declines in child maltreatment from the previous year. Overall substantiated child maltreatment actually declined 2% from 2010 to 2011, including a 3% decline in sexual abuse and a 1% decline in physical abuse. Child maltreatment fatalities were largely unchanged, down 1% from 1538 to 1527.

The data in the tables and graphs included below are derived from the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS), which aggregates and publishes statistics from state child protection agencies. The most recent data from NCANDS were released in December, 2012, and concern cases of child maltreatment investigated in 2011 (USDHHS, 2012).

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/resource/child-maltreatment-2011#cmal-2011files>

The published NCANDS report shows overall substantiated child maltreatment dropping from 9.3 to 9.1 per 1000 children, a 2% decline in the rate of substantiated child maltreatment from 2010 to 2011. The new rate, equivalent to about 681,000 children, is the lowest level of child maltreatment since the NCANDS system was put into place in 1990.

Breaking out data by type of abuse, the report shows that sexual abuse declined 3% from 2010 to 2011 to a nationally estimated 61,500 cases. Physical abuse declined 1% to an estimated 118,800 cases. Neglect was down 1% to an estimated 546,500. (see Figure 1).



Note: Trend estimates represent total change from 1992 to 2011. Annual rates for physical abuse and sexual abuse have been multiplied by 2 and 3 respectively in Figure 1 so that trend comparisons can be highlighted.

¹ The statistics in Table 1 and Figure 1 concern substantiated cases of sexual abuse, physical abuse and neglect. A substantiated case means a case that has been reported to a child protection agency, investigated and deemed to have occurred according to a "preponderance of evidence." The child maltreatment cases referred and investigated by state child protection agencies primarily involve abuse by caregivers. The cases do not include many involving stranger abusers, unless some element of caregiver neglect was involved.

Table 1: State Trends in Child Maltreatment: 2010-2011 and 1992-2011*

US States	Recent Trends: % change in rate 2010-2011			Long-term Trends: % change in rate 1992-2011		
	Sexual Abuse	Physical Abuse	Neglect	Sexual Abuse	Physical Abuse	Neglect
Alabama	-10%	-8%	-8%	-61%	-46%	-75%
Alaska	26%	5%	4%	-90%	-85%	-16%
Arizona	4%	12%	56%	-93%	-68%	-24%
Arkansas	-6%	-16%	-2%	5%	-32%	71%
California	-4%	1%	4%	-85%	-85%	-16%
Colorado	-3%	-4%	-7%	-61%	-63%	34%
Connecticut	8%	1%	-12%	-57%	-85%	-24%
Delaware	12%	27%	1%	-26%	-18%	-4%
District of Columbia (DC)	-33%	-9%	-18%	60%	17%	-43%
Florida	3%	1%	5%	-79%	-72%	-49%
Georgia	-7%	-14%	-4%	-87%	-78%	-68%
Hawaii	-4%	-10%	4%	-72%	-80%	-66%
Idaho	6%	5%	-13%	-94%	-89%	-74%
Illinois	0%	-8%	0%	-22%	9%	-27%
Indiana	-12%	-14%	-17%	-62%	-74%	-8%
Iowa	5%	-3%	-7%	-61%	-49%	145%
Kansas	31%	7%	-10%	-26%	-56%	-50%
Kentucky	-12%	2%	0%	-76%	-80%	2%
Louisiana	39%	18%	14%	-27%	-26%	-18%
Maine	-23%	0%	-7%	-70%	-40%	61%
Maryland	13%	5%	7%	-20%	-43%	-10%
Massachusetts	-6%	-11%	-18%	-69%	-55%	6%
Michigan	3%	7%	5%	-50%	50%	204%
Minnesota	-2%	3%	-2%	-45%	-81%	-57%
Mississippi	-12%	-13%	-4%	-54%	-55%	-9%
Missouri	-5%	7%	18%	-53%	-50%	-66%
Montana	-37%	-19%	-21%	-93%	-94%	-69%
Nebraska	-21%	-12%	-5%	-68%	-73%	26%
Nevada	1%	30%	11%	-56%	-35%	-59%
New Hampshire	-17%	-30%	11%	-81%	-70%	88%
New Jersey	-6%	-18%	-6%	-48%	-84%	-29%
New Mexico	5%	0%	3%	-77%	-61%	8%
New York	-8%	-8%	-5%	-64%	-60%	115%
North Carolina	1%	2%	4%	-6%	33%	-44%
North Dakota	23%	13%	17%	-70%	-82%	-40%
Ohio	-5%	2%	4%	-50%	-13%	-44%
Oklahoma	14%	108%	-5%	-51%	-32%	1%
Oregon	missing	missing	missing	-69%	-62%	11%
Pennsylvania	-7%	-10%	-4%	-49%	-70%	-53%
Rhode Island	-7%	0%	-4%	-78%	-71%	17%
South Carolina	-3%	0%	-4%	-71%	65%	1%
South Dakota	21%	35%	-2%	-88%	-69%	-28%
Tennessee	-1%	-11%	18%	-24%	-59%	5%
Texas	2%	-9%	-3%	-58%	-54%	15%
Utah	-21%	-10%	-15%	-52%	-52%	-16%
Vermont	-17%	22%	57%	-50%	-22%	-85%
Virginia	-4%	-5%	-11%	-68%	-60%	-66%
Washington	1%	-11%	3%	-84%	-79%	-77%
West Virginia	-19%	16%	1%	-75%	-27%	-27%
Wisconsin	5%	11%	1%	-80%	-81%	-61%
Wyoming	5%	-29%	4%	-82%	-94%	-60%

*Note that in states with smaller populations and lower rates of reported maltreatment, small changes can result in large percentage changes

Note: Negative percentages: % decline; Positive percentages: % increase. Due to missing data, long-term trends in SA, PA, and neglect calculated for: CA, 1993-2011; MD, 2001-2011; OR, 1992-2008; WA, 1995-2011; WV, 1998-2011.

The decline in sexual abuse adds to an already substantial positive long term trend. Sexual abuse has declined 63% from 1992 to 2011. The long term trend for physical abuse is also down, decreasing 56% since 1992. The long-term trend for neglect is a relatively small 11% decline since 1992.

It is not possible to directly compare state maltreatment rates because states differ in how statutes define abuse and how abuse is investigated and processed. However, looking at within-state trends, almost all individual states experienced substantial declines in sexual and physical abuse during the period since the early 1990s (see Table 1). Out of the 48 states submitting data to NCANDS, 39 states have seen declines of 50% or more in sexual abuse since 1992. Thirty five states have seen declines of this size in physical abuse. The data do not show any obvious patterns to the decline by region.

In its data on child maltreatment fatalities, the latest NCANDS shows a decrease from 1538 deaths in 2010 to 1527 in 2011.

Because NCANDS reports only those cases known to and confirmed by state authorities, questions are always relevant about the extent to which trends reflect changes in investigatory effort, reporting practices, definitional standards, and administrative or statistical procedures, not real changes in underlying abuse. These factors can clearly play a role. They may be particularly concerning during times of state budget cut backs. However, the recently released Fourth National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS-4) confirmed that the declines documented in the NCANDS data in the period of 1993 to 2008 were probably not statistical or reporting artifacts.

The NIS studies used consistent and standardized definitions of child maltreatment and gathered reports directly from community professionals in schools, hospitals, day care and settings, avoiding problems created when state agencies change their standards, practices or their data systems. The comparison of rates from 1993 to 2008 in NIS-3 and NIS-4 largely tracked the patterns shown in the NCCANDS data over the same period.

http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/abuse_neglect/natl_incid/index.html

Another study was unable to show that worker caseload (an effect of cutbacks, for example) was related declines (Almeida, Cohen, Subramanian & Molnar, 2008). In addition, victim self-report surveys show declines in sexual offenses and physical assaults against children over the same period, also confirming a decline in true underlying incidence (For a summary of some of these supporting surveys, see Finkelhor & Jones, 2012.

http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/pdf/CV267_Have%20SA%20PA%20Decline_FACT%20SHEET_11-7-12.pdf). Still, year to year fluctuations may be due to changes in state policies and should not be given undue emphasis. It is also instructive to note, however, that police reported violent crime and homicide declined from 2010 to 2011 in the face of the recession to the surprise of many criminologists.

<http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr/crime-in-the-u.s/2011/crime-in-the-u.s.-2011/violent-crime/violent-crime>

Other information on child homicide trends are available at this link: <http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/pdf/Child%20Homicide%20and%20Maltreatment%20Fatality%20Rates%202012-11.pdf>

There is currently no consensus in the child maltreatment field about why sexual abuse and physical abuse substantiations have declined so considerably over the longer term, although a recent article and book suggest some possible factors (Finkelhor & Jones, 2006; Finkelhor, 2008). The period when sexual and physical abuse started the dramatic downward trend was marked by sustained economic improvement, increases in the numbers of law enforcement and child protection personnel, more aggressive prosecution and incarceration policies, growing public awareness about the problems, and the dissemination of new treatment options for family and mental health problems, including new psychiatric medication. While some have suggested community notification laws as a possible explanatory factor, the passage and implementation of these laws actually occurred well after the sexual abuse decline was underway.

Table 2: Child Maltreatment Fatality Trends: 2009-2011

US States	Child Maltreatment Fatalities		
	Count 2010	Count 2011	% Change 2010-2011
Alabama	13	11	-15%
Alaska	3	3	0%
Arizona	20	34	70%
Arkansas	19	12	-37%
California	120	123	3%
Colorado	27	31	15%
Connecticut	4	8	100%
Delaware	2	1	-50%
District of Columbia (DC)	2	3	50%
Florida	180	133	-26%
Georgia	77	65	-16%
Hawaii	2	2	0%
Idaho	2	3	50%
Illinois	73	82	12%
Indiana	24	34	42%
Iowa	7	10	43%
Kansas	6	10	67%
Kentucky	30	32	7%
Louisiana	30	45	50%
Maine	1	1	0%
Maryland	24	10	-58%
Massachusetts	missing	missing	missing
Michigan	71	75	6%
Minnesota	14	15	7%
Mississippi	17	13	-24%
Missouri	31	36	16%
Montana	0	0	0%
Nebraska	7	7	0%
Nevada	15	19	27%
New Hampshire	1	2	100%
New Jersey	18	22	22%
New Mexico	19	15	-21%
New York	114	83	-27%
North Carolina	17	19	12%
North Dakota	1	1	0%
Ohio	83	67	-19%
Oklahoma	27	38	41%
Oregon	22	19	-14%
Pennsylvania	29	37	28%
Rhode Island	2	3	50%
South Carolina	25	15	-40%
South Dakota	2	3	50%
Tennessee	38	29	-24%
Texas	222	246	11%
Utah	13	11	-15%
Vermont	4	2	-50%
Virginia	38	36	-5%
Washington	12	20	67%
West Virginia	8	16	100%
Wisconsin	21	24	14%
Wyoming	1	1	0%
Total	1538	1527	-1%

There is no obvious reason why neglect trends have differed so sharply from those of sexual and physical abuse (Jones, Finkelhor & Halter, 2006). One possibility is that neglect has not declined because it has not been the subject of the same level of policy attention and public awareness as sexual and physical abuse.

Another possibility is that increased education and recent state and professional initiatives about neglect, including the identification of new forms of neglect like drug-affected newborns, has masked a decline in other conventional types of neglect.


The fact that overall maltreatment rates did not worsen in the face of economic deterioration is a surprise to many observers. It is unfortunate that information about the trends in child maltreatment are not better publicized and more widely known. The long-term decline in sexual and physical abuse may have important implications for public policy. These trends deserve more discussion, analysis and research.

Additional information about trends in child abuse and neglect is available at: <http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/Trends/index.html>.

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